

MISSING CATHOLICS



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The title of this little booklet may at once bring to your mind the broken families, murdered people, and displaced persons transported to only God knows where by ruthless tyrants in Communist and Muslim-occupied countries. There would be good grounds for your thinking in such a way for the number of missing Catholics in that sense of the word is almost beyond human calculation.

All the same, this booklet is concerned with other Catholics who are missing—Catholics who are missing due to religious indifference. Those missing Catholics are tragedies both for the Church and for the victims of the prevalent atmosphere—almost the epidemic—of religious indifference.

Often, it is noted that, in response to a compulsory civic or military census, many people identify themselves as Catholic. We find that these same Catholics are missing Mass and missing their prayers. They are missing a host of blessings and consolation that they try to persuade themselves they do not miss at all in this life. They also seldom refer to their danger of missing all prospects of eternal happiness in the next life.

Now if you, who happen to be reading this booklet, are one of the missing ones, it is to you that I wish particularly to speak. I want to remind you of things you have too easily forgotten; or to which, perhaps, you have never given any real thought at all. For if you are a “should-be” Catholic, there is a glorious inheritance which is rightfully yours, even though at present you do not claim it. It has obligations, of course, as well as privileges; and maybe you feel a sense of relief from the obligations in waiving your claim to the privileges. In reality, the privileges far outweigh the obligations, and you are missing far more than you realize in just letting yourself drift.

ALWAYS A CATHOLIC

That is easily said, I know. However, we’ll see more about that as we go along. For the moment, let us begin where everything began for you in this particular matter. If you describe yourself as a Catholic, it is because you were at least baptized or christened a Catholic. That means that you can never really cease to be a Catholic for baptism is an indelible and irrevocable action that cannot be undone. It literally marks one off, sets one aside, branding the very soul as the property of Jesus Christ and a member of the Catholic Church.

At one time firms used to paste labels on the bottles in which they marketed their products, but labels are easily removed. For greater protection, therefore, enterprising firms got the bottle manufacturers to mould their name into the very glass, making it part of the bottle. Then it could never be removed so long as the vessel itself continued to exist.

It's rather like that with baptism. Once a Catholic, always a Catholic. However we may forget, however far we wander, we are still Catholics. Were a Catholic to die and be brought back to life again, he could not be re-baptized. He is still what he always was—a Catholic. Even the taunt, uttered in bitter hatred and anger—I have heard it—“You're a Catholic and you'll never be anything else,” is but expressing the literal truth.

Of course, there is a difference between “being” a Catholic and “living” as a Catholic. By our baptism we become simply Catholics—not good ones; not bad ones. Once baptized, we are all equally Catholics. The kind of Catholic each one is, good, bad, or indifferent, will be determined by the way in which each one lives. That's why Catholics vary so greatly in quality. By physical birth, we became children of our natural parents. However, that did not compel us to become what our parents would have wished us to become. Therefore, by baptismal re-birth we became children of God. However, that also could not compel us to become what God wanted us to become. We have the free will to make what we choose of ourselves and our baptismal inheritance. However, of that we shall see more later.

BEST OF RELIGIONS

One thing we do know. If we are Catholics, whatever we ourselves are making of our religion in practice, ours is the best of all religions on the face of the earth. “Yes. I'm a Catholic; but not much of a one, so don't judge the Catholic religion by me!” How often that has been said!

The truth is that the Catholic religion is the most perfectly balanced and beautiful religion the world has ever seen. It is the religion given by God for the eternal salvation of all mankind. History shows it is the religion that has been the greatest of all influences for good through over twenty centuries of civilization. It is the religion in which millions have found peace of soul and which the saints of every age declare with one voice to have been the secret of the heroic lives all the world has been compelled to admire.

I'm not saying that because I happen to be a Catholic. Others who are not Catholics have paid their tributes to the beauty and power of Catholicism. Writing in the “Hibbert Journal,” of July 1930, the Rev. Lloyd Thomas, a Protestant minister of Birmingham, England, said, “We can all be magnanimous enough to recognize that Rome is the steward of the moral witness of the Christian Church. The supreme attraction of Rome is to be found in its ethical rigorism. She represents the last loyalty of the human race to its own highest moral standards. She is the steel barrier of Christianity against the overwhelming invasion of the corrupting neo-paganism of our times.”

I had lunch recently with a prominent Freemason, the Grand Master of his Lodge, who said to me, “I know you're right, old chap, and I'll probably become a Catholic some day. But not yet.” However, he was not lost to all sense of justice and, at that lunch, he told me of this incident.

“I was talking to a fellow Mason one day,” he said, “when the fellow began to voice his objections to the Catholic Church, declaring that he could not stand her intolerance.”

“I dislike the Catholic Church for the same reason as yourself,” I said to him. “Do you know why we dislike her so much?”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because,” I answered, “she tells us we mustn’t do the wrong things we want to do. Let’s get the record straight. No one ever leaves the Catholic Church to become better. If a man drops his Catholic religion because it forbids his own rotten conduct it is because he himself is no good, not because there’s anything wrong with his religion. I have never known anyone to abandon the Catholic religion and be the better for doing so, whilst no one has ever sincerely become a Catholic except for higher ideals than he had before. If we can’t bring ourselves to admit that, we can at least have the grace to be silent on the subject.”

My friend’s fellow Mason did not pursue the conversation. However, it is not difficult to understand the impression non-Catholics have of the intolerance of the Catholic Church. If they haven’t the Catholic Faith, what else are they to think?

The Catholic Church knows that she is unique, the one divinely authorized custodian of the Truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ. People are shocked by her claim to be the one true Church. She makes that claim—she is the only one that does—and she is ready to prove it by the evidence of Sacred Scripture, history, and reason. Logically, she makes equally uncompromising claims upon the lives of her members. She demands that, as men went from God in the first place by disobedience, so they will retrace their steps by obedience. If religion is to get us back to God, that must be the very essence of religion. It was certainly the very essence of the life of Christ Himself whose motto had been written in advance, “Behold I come to do Thy Will, O God.”

It is this Catholic religion that has been, and is, to millions of people the light of their minds and the pledge of their salvation. For Catholic worship is all to one purpose—to make us better, to unite us to God, to console and strengthen us in the trials of life, to ensure our happiness in heaven. It’s the only philosophy worthwhile—religion perfecting the complete human being, body and soul, mind and heart, for time and eternity.

That is the religion to which all baptized Catholics belong, the missing ones as well as those who have refused to drift.

GLORIOUS TRADITIONS

The missing ones, who have never known any other religion than that of their baptism, and who perhaps know very little beyond the fact that they ought to be Catholics, owe even that much to the heroic and unswerving fidelity of a long line of Catholics before

them. For if you are one of the missing Catholics today, you are at least a descendant of those who kept the Faith in the past, often enduring incredible sufferings and privations rather than forsake it. They are the non-Catholics who are the descendants of those who abandoned their religion under the stress of persecution. That story, of course, could lead us a long way back.

During the first three hundred years when it was death to be a Catholic, Christians braved all penalties and took all risks rather than desert the same Faith that we profess.

Nearer to hand is the Protestant Reformation period. In the face of the most violent measures of repression, confiscation of property, and threats to their lives, nations like Ireland and Poland, large sections of Germany and Holland, though only a handful, alas, in England and Scotland, remained true to their Catholic inheritance. Their fidelity to their religion did not mean less loyalty to their country, generosity and devotedness in its service, and courage in its defense. However, they had a loyalty to God and to their conscience, which they were determined also to maintain; and the faith of succeeding generations of Catholics was a legacy made possible by their fidelity.

I am very conscious, as a convert, when speaking to those whose forefathers remained true to the Faith that I myself am a descendant of those who deserted it. Who is the son of renegades, that he should urge the children of the martyrs to stand firm? Yet I do not often presume to do that. This particular booklet is quite exceptional. For my lifework has been almost invariably directed towards those still in the ranks of those from whom I came, the ranks of those born of non-Catholic parents and who, through no fault of their own, have neither known Catholicism nor dreamed that there they might find the Truth.

APOSTOLATE TO NON-CATHOLICS

My main duty for over a quarter of a century has been to reply to radio inquiries about the Catholic religion submitted by the general public. That, of course, ties one down to the isolated and disconnected problems each listener wants to hear discussed. However, I have also been able to undertake many missions to non-Catholics when a much more comprehensive presentation of the Catholic religion has been possible.

It is in such missions above all that one can enkindle a hunger for Catholicism in the hearts of those who have never known it, a new desire which gives them no peace until they too possess this greatest of all God's blessings to mankind. Catholics attending such missions have benefited greatly from them. How many of them have said, "Father, I have learned more about my religion hearing it explained to others than I ever knew before!"

However, such missions are not primarily for them. They are for the "other sheep" that Our Lord wills also to be brought into the one fold of the Catholic Church. Hundreds of converts have resulted from them. As one of them put it, "I went away feeling that I was missing ever so much by not being a Catholic!"

To instruct and receive converts into the Church is a source of perpetual edification and often astonishment. They come so humbly, “Father, I don’t know what I have ever done to deserve so great a grace as this,” one will say. Another says, “I don’t know how I lived all those years without being a Catholic.”

Another person states, “Now I must set to work and make up for lost time. I’ll never overtake your good Catholics who have had the Faith since childhood and have been able to receive Holy Communion all their lives!”

These converts firmly believe they have discovered a joy that has been the life-long experience of the born Catholic. Life-long experience as it could and should be, if every Catholic took his religion seriously. Read what some of them have had to say!

JOY OF CONVERTS

“Every hour,” wrote Frederick William Faber, “so augments inward peace that I cannot but yearn that those I love should enjoy the same privileges with myself. A new light seems to be shed on everything—a light so clear as to surprise.”

“From the time I became a Catholic,” Cardinal Newman wrote in his turn, “I have been in perfect peace and contentment. It was like coming into port after a rough sea.”

Father Maturin said, of his own experience, “There has been an ever-deepening sense of security, with moments of intense realization of the glory and strength of the City of God, whose walls are salvation and whose gates are peace.”

“The Church promises a great deal,” exclaimed Robert Hugh Benson, “but my experience is that she gives ten times more. The Catholic Church is supremely what she promises to be. She is the priceless pearl for which the greatest sacrifice is not too great.”

“The Church is fairer than we dared to dream,” declared Kegan Paul, “and my first fervor was as nothing to what I feel now. Day by day the mystery of the Altar seems greater, the unseen world nearer, God more a Father, Our Lady more tender, the great company of the Saints more friendly, my Guardian Angel closer to my side.”

IMMENSE SACRIFICES

“No sacrifice is too great,” said Benson. Thousands of converts have had that conviction. I have seen staggering sacrifices made by converts I myself have received into the Church; relatives alienated, friends lost, legacies forfeited, business prospects ruined. With Saint Paul, as Monsignor Knox gives us his words, they have said, “There is nothing I do not write down as loss compared with the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For love of Him I have lost everything, treat everything else as refuse, if I may have Christ to my credit.” (Phil, III, 8).

How many times I have said to careless Catholics, “If you had had to make anything like the sacrifices to keep your faith that so many converts have made to become a Catholic, you would not throw your religion away as though it were worthless! However, you have not appreciated it. You have taken it for granted, because you got it too easily, too cheaply.”

Often those who have been without it know how to make the best use of it when they get it. Surely, everyone bearing the Catholic name would agree that it shouldn’t be so, and that those who have had the Faith all their lives should be the ones who have grown into the greater appreciation of it!

HOSTILITY OF UNBELIEVERS

The enemies of the Catholic Church certainly do not take her cheaply! They are not indifferent to her, and wanting in enthusiasm in their efforts to bring about her destruction. Throughout the world atheists, secularists, and communists wage continual war against her. Communists, of course, wherever they are in power have come right out into the open.

A Catholic girl, recently escaped from Hungary, tells how she went to church one Sunday morning in her entirely Catholic village. However, she and all the other Catholics arriving for Mass found the doors of the church closed, a Communist guard lined up to prevent the people from entering, and a great placard was posted on the door of the church reading, “THIS CHURCH IS CLOSED — BECAUSE THERE IS NO GOD.”

In our own democracies, secularists and unbelieving materialists are no less active. In season and out of season, in books and newspapers, and from public platforms, they seek to undermine Christian principles and practices, concentrating their attention on the Catholic Church that they instinctively recognize as the last stronghold of the Christian religion in this world.

Theirs is the new paganism with which Catholics have to contend, as the early Christians had to contend with the paganism of the ancient Roman world. It is not a conflict between morality and immorality—a conflict with people accepting Christian teaching but not living up to it. It is a conflict between two different moralities—secular and Christian. One holds that man is but an animal, with no future beyond this life, and no obligation to live as if he were not a mere animal. The other holds that man is a child of God consisting of a body and of a soul made in God’s image and likeness, a soul immortal of its very nature and destined to live on forever in a state of eternal happiness or eternal misery according to the way in which he has behaved during his time of probation on earth.

However, the fight against the sheer and dreary, yet very militant irreligion of the secularists is not the only battle to be fought.

RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY

Unfortunately, sympathizing with the attack upon the Catholic Church by complete unbelievers, religious prejudice and bigotry have joined forces with them. If ever people knew not what they were doing, they are those non-Catholics who, whilst professing to be Christians, seek in every way to discredit and destroy the Catholic Church. For if she goes, their churches go also.

What can one say of them? Is their hatred of the Catholic religion so much greater than their love for Christ that they are willing to become friends with the enemies of all religion in the hope of wrecking the Catholic Church? Inevitably one thinks of Herod and Pilate, who became friends as Christ Himself went to His death!

After his conversion, G. K. Chesterton wrote a book on the things that would have made him a Catholic, if he had not already become one. Certainly the diabolical hatred of the Catholic Church, whether on the part of secularist unbelievers or of those who are the victims of unreasoning religious prejudice and blind bigotry, would have been sufficient to make me suspect the truth of the Catholic Church had I myself not been moved by other considerations to become a Catholic.

In the early Church, many converts from paganism owed their conversion to the very sight of the violent and irrational hatred for the name of Christ. They were led to study His life and claims. They found that He was goodness itself, and incapable of speaking anything but the truth. Only the rebellious principle of evil that abominates God could explain the infernal hatred of which He was the object. They were shocked into taking sides. Being men of good will, on the side of decency and virtue, they felt that they had no choice but to become Christians.

The same thing is happening today. There are those who have seen that the same forces that have given rise to a hatred of Christ through all the ages are directed in a peculiar way against the Catholic Church as against no other institution in this world. This phenomenon has started them on their enquiries. And they have ended by becoming Catholics.

THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Not only non-Catholics have reacted in such a way. Many a careless Catholic has been driven back to the fervent practice of his religion by a sudden advertence to the issues at stake.

I remember the case of one Catholic man, a railway employee, who had been transferred away from home to a country centre as a machinist, fitter in the railway depot workshop there. In his new surroundings, he dropped his religion in practice, neither making

himself known to the local priest, nor attending Mass. None of his fellow workers was so much as aware that he was a Catholic. No letters of mine, written to him at the request of his parents, seemed to have any effect upon him.

One day, however, during the lunch hour, the Catholic Church came up for discussion; and such a tirade of abuse against Catholics and their religion, such a stream of vile calumnies against priests and nuns, poured from the lips of one of the men, that the Catholic was shocked out of his lethargy and indifference. He told the offender what he thought of him. He told the others what lying calumnies they had just heard. He professed himself to be a Catholic—a bad one until then, but not henceforth. The next weekend saw him at Confession, Mass, and Holy Communion. He has never looked back.

“In that moment,” he wrote to me, “I was made to realize that I was either a Catholic or a traitor; as much an enemy of the Church as any other—even worse. I had to take sides, and I wasn’t going to be one of that crew. So I’ve returned to the Sacraments—to stay. I’ve had my lesson.”

GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

We Catholics have a responsibility. The interests of the Kingdom of God on earth have been entrusted to us. We are responsible for that even in the face of a world that hates us and in spite of the opposition of even religiously minded people who are misguided enough to think they do God a service by hindering us in every possible way.

We can’t get away from that responsibility. We have been baptized as Catholics. Just as we have been born into human society and must accept our social duties, so we have been born into that great spiritual society known as the Catholic Church by a supernatural rebirth, and must accept the duties proper to that society also. We walk in two societies—the nation and the Church and two sets of duties must be fulfilled.

An infidel once said, “If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another life, religion would be everything to me. It would be my first waking thought and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I would strive to look upon eternity alone and on the immortal souls around me who would soon be everlastingly miserable or everlastingly happy.”

Certainly, if the Catholic Church is to do her work, the first thing necessary is for her own members to equip themselves and stand firm. The Church desperately needs Catholics who take their religion seriously and who are militant in their fight against unchristian and antichristian influences, zealous in their positive efforts to observe Christian principles in their personal conduct, and to diffuse them in the home circle, in commercial, professional, and national life.

“The Barque of Peter,” said an old sea captain who happened to be an excellent Catholic, “is no tourist ship, but a freighter. She has no room for passengers; only crew and it’s a case of all hands on deck.”

The “love of Christ urges us,” said Saint Paul. By His goodness to us, He has placed us under an enormous obligation that it is for us to try to realize—and to repay.

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

No one could pretend for a moment of course, that all Catholics even attempt to fulfill their obligation. I commenced this booklet by speaking of the “missing” Catholics. They, alas, are legion. In all our big cities, and scattered up and down the country, are hosts of Catholics known to be such only by themselves—and God. They are missing from their Church, unacquainted with their priest, unrecorded in diocesan statistics.

What are the causes of this tragedy? To put the question directly to missing Catholics, why have you drifted away from the practice of your religion?

There is, I know, the paralyzing influence of the secular environment in which we live. The external changes in the world are as nothing compared with the change that has come over men’s souls.

We live in a world of “shaking foundations and dissolving loyalties.” Secularism has swept through the ranks of the society in which we live and move and in which we have our very being. National and international authorities ignore religion. Books, newspapers, films—all conspire to promote the struggle for and enjoyment of material welfare to the forgetfulness of God. The wave of popular indifference to religion creates the impression that destiny doesn’t really depend on religious considerations; that they are not essential; that one can take them or leave them as one pleases.

Well, it is easier, undoubtedly, to go with the current than swim against it. But to deplore the moral and spiritual breakdown of our civilization—as so many even amongst the missing Catholics do—and also forsake the practice of one’s religion is surely no way to make things better.

It may take an effort; but the only thing to do is to turn and swim against the tide sweeping so relentlessly on towards the abyss of irreligion and despair.

KNOW YOUR RELIGION

Missing Catholics will often say, “But I don’t know anything about my religion.”

I must confess that I have never heard that plea without a good deal of sympathy for those who make it. Thousands of people in this country have parents with enough faith to

get them baptized, but not enough faith to bother teaching them their religion. It certainly did not help for them to be sent to state schools where religion was expressly excluded from the subjects taught. So, it can easily be that many Catholics have left school and set out on life with little or no real knowledge of their religion and with even less training in its duties.

However, such a boy or girl still remains a Catholic. There is no reason why one's lack of knowledge of religion should not be made good in later years. We try to improve our knowledge of ever so many things inadequately taught us at school. Why take it for granted that a child's knowledge—such as it is— should be enough to see us through life where our religion is concerned?

Surely, the effort to remedy ignorance of our religion would be well worthwhile. After many years of study to prepare for the priesthood, a Catholic boy leaves home and country to go to the foreign missions. There, he has to work to learn a new and difficult language. Then, in a climate that is bad, with fever rampant, with barely the necessities of life provided for him, certainly with no worldly advantages, he devotes all his energies to spreading knowledge of the Catholic Faith amongst pagan tribes. If he is prepared to endure such self-sacrifice so others can obtain knowledge of the Catholic religion, should not ill-instructed Catholics at home go to the much less trouble of securing a sound knowledge of it for themselves?

In another case, a young, good-hearted protestant lad, of about eighteen years of age, met a blind Catholic man and offered to visit and read to him occasionally. One day the blind man wanted a pamphlet about the Catholic religion read to him. So impressed was the protestant Good Samaritan by the contents of that one booklet, that he obtained and read for himself every Catholic booklet he could lay his hands upon. He sought instruction from a priest, was received into the Church, and went on with his studies until there were few Catholic laymen who had anything like his knowledge of their religion. They envied him his knowledge, his fervor, and his enthusiasm for it. However, it did not seem to enter their heads that they could become equally proficient in their religion if they took the same interest in it.

Why should not the born Catholic re-study his religion in his adult years when a greater understanding of it is possible, just as every convert has had to study it? I have even heard Catholics say wistfully that converts make the best Catholics. But there is no earthly reason why that should be so; and it would not be so—if it is so— had all Catholics made the same efforts to know and understand their religion as converts in their efforts to get it.

“IF THAT’S WHAT RELIGION MEANS!”

There are, of course, many reasons given by missing Catholics for their neglect of religious duties. However, we all know, even as they themselves—in their heart of hearts—know the answer to those reasons.

For example, there are those who point to the poor lives and the bad example given by many who regularly attend church and fulfill their religious obligations of worship. They will say, “If that’s what religion means, I don’t want it.” They know quite well that that’s not what the Catholic religion means.

During the years before I became a Catholic, I often said that Catholics are a pretty poor lot in practice, and that the history of their Church is a quarry from which scandals can be unearthed almost at will. I still say it, though now without losing sight of the other side of the picture.

One who knows the teaching of Christ and the proverbial weakness of human nature soon gets over the shock of dis-edifying lives. Christ Himself said, “It must needs be that scandals will come.” However, He did not forget to add, “Nevertheless, woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.” Not, for a moment would He would not sanction the scandals for a moment. The Catholic Church does not sanction them either. However gentle she may be towards sinners, she is adamant in condemning the sin. Meantime, she knows what the Catholic religion can do with the Saints. Where that religion fails to secure such results, it has been held in check by the evil propensities or the human frailties of those who have resisted its influence.

The unfairness of the attitude of those who make the faults of others an excuse for their own laxity should be evident. No man refuses to join even a political party because he happens to like or not like someone who belongs to it instead of examining the party’s program.

Let us take the Catholic religion as it is in itself. On the twentieth anniversary of his reception into the Church, Monsignor Ronald Knox answered the question as to whether he was disappointed with the Catholic Church after having made its closer acquaintance. His reply went something like this, “Am I disappointed? With myself, yes; for when I was received into the Church it seemed that there was nothing left for me now but to become a saint and I’m far from that yet. With Catholics, yes; for they are not half as good as they ought to be with so wonderful a religion. With priests, yes; even as they are all disappointed with themselves. With the Catholic Church, no; she is the one true Church she has ever claimed to be.”

Missing Catholics ought to ask themselves, in turn, some questions. If the reality at times does not seem to correspond with the ideal, are things improved by our abandoning the Church also, and helping to make the contrast still more glaring? And whom does one hurt by the neglect of one’s own religious duties? Not those of whose conduct we complain. Their sins are not remedied by our sinning too. They are not converted by our

sharing in their infidelity. The only ones we hurt are Our Lord, our own souls, and all whom our own bad example helps to lead astray. The wrong ones are being punished—and fruitlessly.

“MONEY! MONEY! MONEY!”

One excuse not uncommonly heard is, “I don’t attend church anymore because the priests are always asking for money.”

Well, for whom do they ask it? For themselves? Or for the poor, for our children in the schools, for foreign missions, for works of charity, for the glory of God’s House? They have to let us know what is needed, for that is their responsibility. If we give of the possessions our life makes possible, the priest gives still more—himself, his life, renouncing an earthly career and family affections. Moreover, everyone knows that no Catholic is asked to give more than he can afford.

But if there were anything in this excuse, it would be as valid for good Catholics as for the careless ones; and the good ones have never made this charge a reason for neglecting fidelity in their religious duties to God. In a spirit of deep faith and with spontaneous generosity, they have delighted in supporting their Church.

“I’ve never been the poorer for giving to God, Father,” said an old Catholic working man to me one day, “and I’ve certainly never yet heard of anyone going bankrupt through doing so.”

There is something in casting your bread upon the waters!

“I’M NO GOOD”

To the credit of most missing Catholics, it must be said that they refuse to fall back on the shortcomings of others as an excuse for their own neglect. More often, they will say, “What’s the use of going to church? I can’t live up to it, and I’m not going to be a hypocrite and pretend I do.” One has at least to admire the honesty and humility of the admission that the fault lies in oneself.

However, to go to Mass is not to pretend to be a saint! Nor need there be a trace of hypocrisy in such an external fulfillment of religious duties. The Pharisee may have been a hypocrite, but the publican wasn’t; though both equally went into the Temple—“the publican to pray,” as Saint Augustine remarks, “the Pharisee to praise—himself!”

I know what you will say, “The publican was repentant and didn’t intend to go on with his sins; and I can’t break with mine.” Even so, you would not necessarily be a hypocrite

by continuing to attend Mass. Hypocrisy depends on one's motive. If you did go to Mass in order to pretend that you were good, you would be a hypocrite; but not if you went without any such pretence, moved only by the desire to fulfill God's law as far as you could.

The Catholic Church has always refused to become the Church of the "elect." Arnold Lunn remarks somewhere that if a Methodist keeps a mistress he ceases to attend his Church; but a Catholic in a similar position would still go to Mass even though unable to approach the Sacraments. He knows that the Catholic Church is for all—sinners as well as saints.

The Catholic Church never forgets her Divine Founder's words, "I come to call, not the just who need not repentance, but sinners." So, she bids sinners come, not because they are good, but because they should want to be good and because she knows how to deal with their sins. If they don't become good quickly enough, and she is reproached for the low standards of so many who frequent her services, she has her answer in the legion of saints through all the ages.

I remember an old priest going round his parish taking the census. He came to the house of a man who at first denied that he was a Catholic. However, the man didn't do it too convincingly and the priest pressed the question as to his religion.

"Well, Father," the man said, "if you must know, I'm a Catholic—or supposed to be one. But you may as well wipe me off. I'm no good."

The old priest's eyes softened at once. "For that matter, I'm not much good myself," he said, "but if we can't do what we can't do, that's no reason why we shouldn't do what we can do. I'm trying to do what I can do, and that's why I'm looking you up. You can at least come to Mass, even if you can't do everything else. You can say your prayers. You know, if you break one commandment, that's no reason why you should break the lot. There's no point telling God that you might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. Be as generous as you can with God, and He'll find a way to be generous to you in the end, believe me."

The man believed him, and went regularly to Mass after that; and the day came when he made his peace with God, returned to the Sacraments, and more than experienced the generosity of God upon which the old priest had promised him he could rely.

THE GREATEST INJUSTICE

Does the fulfillment of our religious duties matter? Of course it matters!

It matters more than anything else. What we do about it is the most important fact in our human existence. Our religious duties are the most valuable of all, the things we do. For they alone enable us to transcend an ignoble self-love; and upon our acceptance or rejection of them, our very eternity depends.

A man may sin through human frailty in other ways—a frailty for which God is prepared to make every possible allowance. However, the omission of religious duties is a cold, calculating form of injustice that can make no claim to such consideration. If, as Holy Scripture says, pagans were guilty because they did not worship God as they should and if the Jews were guilty (guilty to the extent of forfeiting their inheritance) how much more guilty are Catholics who today claim that inheritance as their own, yet neglect the greatest of its obligations—to render due and fitting worship to God?

It is not that God needs our worship. However, not to render that worship is the greatest possible injustice on our part; and God cannot want us to be unjust. If we pay butcher and baker and grocer for the food by which we maintain life, how much more ready we should be to make a due return to God for the life that food maintains?

Religion is the highest form of justice, inspiring us to render due acknowledgment to God. That is why, in giving us the Ten Commandments in the right order of importance, God Himself devoted the first three of them to our obligations towards Himself. He insists that we acknowledge Him to be the one and only True God, that we hold Him in due reverence, and that we regularly fulfill our duties of religious worship.

To have no religion is a very evil thing—the greatest of all dishonesties. Is it not a striking fact that even irreligious parents would not take from their own children what they expect God to take from them? What parents would permit their children to ignore them completely and treat them as if they did not so much as exist?

THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

Look again at what our religion means. After all, we are Christians. We believe that “God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son.”

“Man,” said Saint Augustine, “owed God so great a debt that he could not pay; therefore God became man and as man paid man’s debt.” It meant a life of suffering, ending in His death. It seems almost incredible that any Catholic could believe that the Eternal Son of God went to so much trouble on our behalf, yet not even go to the trouble of taking his religion seriously.

Remember who Christ is. You have but to grant a single point—that He was not the greatest liar and blasphemer who ever set foot in this world. For, if not, then He was what He claimed to be—God; and all that He declares will happen is going to happen. He will come to judge the living and the dead.

To His Church we Catholics belong. That Church is not merely a mechanical machine of cogs running under a single central motor. She is a living organism, of which we are the living cells, every cell contributing to her health and vitality.

There are degrees of life, spiritually as well as physically. After the last war, Europe was swarming with orphaned and vagabond children, living by scavenging. However, they were only just alive—poor, thin, emaciated, undernourished, with no glow of health, and no vigor of life. Spiritually, also, there are Catholics like that, with no glow of fervor, no desire of virtue, no taste for the things of God, no longing for heaven. They are spiritually ill, half-dead.

Well, God has given us the Faith; but He won't compel us to live it. No one else can live our lives for us. It is for each one of us to do his part. How necessary it is that each should do so! True, the Catholic Church cannot die. Our Lord has promised that. However, she can lose power as life and vitality fail in any one of us. She can be weaker when slothful and careless Catholics abound.

The cause of Christ is, then, the cause of every Catholic without exception. Every missing Catholic lets Him down and weakens the Church.

BEGIN HERE

The missing Catholic may ask, "But where shall I begin?" To that I would say, "At least begin by taking up the duty of prayer." It may need an effort at first, because you have got out of the habit of it. However, you will grow into it. We learn to pray by praying, as a child learns to walk by walking. If you have forgotten your prayers, get a prayer book.

One thing is certain. Prayer is absolutely necessary. God has made the welfare of our soul depend upon it, even as He has made our bodily life dependent upon the air we breathe. "Alas for the man too busy to pray," exclaimed Cardinal Manning, "for he is too busy to save his soul."

Christ Himself both set us the example of prayer and taught us the necessity of it. Whatever else He Himself did, He prayed. "Rising early, He went to a desert place and there He prayed." "He ascended into a mountain alone to pray." He spent "the whole night in prayer." "Being in an agony, He prayed the longer." To us He says, "Watch and pray." "Ask and you shall receive."

Secondly, if you do not already go, resume your attendance at Mass at least on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. The fulfillment of the religious duty of assistance at the public and corporate worship of God in our churches is essential. It is by such attendance that we publicly acknowledge the duty of religion, publicly profess our belief as Catholics, and make public admission of the need of God's help. To neglect Mass is to give our vote that God shall be forgotten.

The mystery is that any Catholic can bring himself to miss Mass. We know the price our Catholic ancestors paid rather than allow themselves to be robbed of it. At the time of the Protestant Reformation in England, Saint John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, challenged Cranmer with the protest, “He who would abolish the Mass plots no less a calamity than would be the destruction of the very sun from the heavens.”

Even a non-Catholic of our own times, Augustine Birrell, wrote in the “Nineteenth Century” magazine, “Nobody nowadays, save a handful of vulgar fanatics speaks irreverently of the Mass. If indeed the Incarnation be the one divine event to which the whole creation moves, the miracle of the Altar may well seem its restful shadow cast over a dry and thirsty land for the help of man.....It is the Mass that matters; it is the Mass that makes the difference.”

Thirdly, let us read all we can about our Faith, and improve our knowledge of it. Let us do our best to live up to its ideals in our personal daily lives. In that, of course, we shall be only more or less successful. We are not saints. We have our human frailties. However, we must try. The old priest I mentioned earlier said, “If we can’t do what we can’t do, we can do what we can do.” If we are faithful to our personal prayers and to our assistance at Mass, these religious practices will gradually emancipate us from slavish subjection to temporal and passing material things, help us to recover our sense of true values, and let into our lives the light of spiritual realities.

THE WORLD NOT ALL

The more we think, the more we see the necessity of this recovery of our sense of true values.

It may be that our civilization will perish unless people turn to God. However, the real reason for a return to God is that He wants us and we need Him. In Him alone will we find a purpose great enough to satisfy the innate longings that are part of our very nature. Man lives by bread, but not by bread alone. He hungers for faith and hope and love and his faith must be faith in something, in someone.

Communists speak of the Christian hope as “Pie in the sky when you die.” However, everyone knows that is a caricature—it’s not “pie” and it’s not in the “sky” that awaits us. Many who are not Communists refuse to look beyond this life at all. “Give me enough to eat and drink, a decent home, and a wife or husband as the case may be, and a certain amount of enjoyment, and that’s all I ask of life.”

That’s all an animal asks—food, shelter, a mate, and a bit of play when young. We are not mere animals. The man who lives like that may say, “Well, I’m happy.” However, he is not half as happy as he is meant to be. He is neither putting into life nor getting out of it

anything like what he could. He is missing the real meaning and direction of life, and will end having had no serious purpose, having done no particular good, and having a judgment to face for having rejected the one hope of his salvation.

THEN THE JUDGMENT

The eternal truths are realities, whatever we choose to do about them. Thus, all admit that death comes to everybody, and that they too must die. However, many refuse to believe this in practice and behave as if they were going to live forever and never die. Yet the shadow of death is always there; and the dread of what lies beyond it is never really lifted from us, however little we can bear to think about it.

So, too, the great facts of the Incarnation and of the Catholic Church remain the same, whether we take notice of them or not. However, to behave as if the Incarnation had never happened and as if Our Lord had never gone to the trouble of establishing His Church at all; to behave as if these things had nothing whatever to do with you is a very great sin.

“When the Holy Ghost is come,” Our Lord said, “He will convince the world of sin, because they believed not in Me.”

It is true that people whose eyes are dim to God are little concerned about their sins. Conscience can be repressed so that its voice is scarcely heard. People can even pretend to themselves that what is wrong is right, when they wish to do it. However, God’s law is still there, and is still what it is.

Can we help asking ourselves whether God is satisfied with us and does it matter whether He is or not? He is going to ask us some day what we have made of our religion; what our religion has meant to us, and we to it. There is a judgment, with a possible sentence of eternal condemnation. If you say, “I don’t worry about the next world,” then spare yourself having to worry about it when you’re in it. Use this life as a preparation for it—a brief period during which you are free to ensure for yourself eternal happiness, instead of the loss of it and all that that will mean.

DAY-DREAMS WON’T DO

Every Catholic—even the missing Catholic—finds himself thinking at times along these lines. For things happen that bring home to him the fact that his faith is not dead yet.

A young garage hand, who had been coming to me for instructions during several months, on hearing that *I* was to go away to a distant place for quite a time, begged me to receive him into the Church before I went. The only opportunity was on the following Tuesday morning, which would mean his being late on the job that day.

"I'll manage it, Father," he said, "The boss isn't a Catholic, and we're very busy, but I think I'll be able to get around him."

The lad turned up at the appointed time and was duly received into the Church.

Afterwards I said to him, "The boss didn't mind?"

"Not in the end," he said. "But when I first mentioned it to him, he just exploded. Literally shouted that we were behind with everything, that he wasn't going to have any slackers hanging around his shop, and that he wouldn't hear of it. When I could get a word in, I told him that I was going to become a Catholic, that the priest was going away, and the only chance he had to receive me into the Church was this morning. You should have seen the change that came over him. He stopped as if somebody had hit him on the head with a hammer. Then he put out his hand and said, "God bless you, Bob. You can have a week off for that if you need it. I only hope you'll be a better Catholic than I am. Then he just turned away and left me breathless. No one in the place had ever guessed that he was a Catholic. It's wonderful where they turn up, Father, when you come to think of it!"

That boss was a typical missing Catholic: faith enough to be happy in the thought of others becoming Catholics, yet not conviction enough to live up to his religion himself. Or maybe there was nothing wrong with his convictions. He had just drifted away, still hoping that all would come right in the end—a hope very near to presumption, ever liable to fall into the other extreme of despair.

Cardinal Manning has well described such types. "Men are ever beguiling themselves," he writes, "with a dream that they shall be what they are not now. They hope one day to be different; they balance their present consciousness of a low worldly life, and of a mind heavy and dull to spiritual things, with the lazy thought that someday God will bring home to them in power the realities of faith in Christ. So, men dream away their lives in pleasure, sloth, trade, or study. Who is there that has not at some time secretly indulged this soothing flattering, that the staid gravity of age, when youth is quelled; or the leisure of retirement, when the fret of busy life is over; or, it may be, the inevitable pains and griefs that are man's inheritance, shall one day break up in his heart the now sealed fountain of repentance and make at last his religion a reality? Who has not allayed the uneasy consciousness of a meager religion with the hope of a future change? Who has not been mocked by the enemy of mankind, the enemy of every man? Who has not listened, all too readily to him who would cheat us of the hour that is, and of the spiritual earnings which faith makes day by day in God's service, stealing from us the present hour that is, and leaving us a lie in exchange?"

How well I remember being called to the deathbed of a military officer who had abandoned the protestantism of his youth for a life of complete irreligion! In his last lingering illness from cancer of the lungs and throat (due to his having been gassed during the First World War) he had taken up the study of the Catholic religion. As a result, he asked to be received into the Catholic Church. However, the new realization of

the things that really matter drew from him the remark, “Well, Father, I’m saving my soul, but I’ve lost my life. That life I used for myself as long as it was any good to me. But now it’s of no use any more—I’m giving God the dregs. I wish to God I had been a Catholic as a boy. Things would have been very different then.”

THE ONLY CHOICE

Surely, the only sensible choice is to take up our religion and to make the most of it whilst the opportunity is ours. We are living in the midst of a serious emergency, a time of economic and social troubles both national and international. There are those who say that these anxieties are more than enough to occupy their thoughts—that it will be time enough to think about religion when things get better. But what made the emergency? Not the things we see. Evil dispositions in the souls of men have been the main cause of all the troubles. The problems will be there until we put our souls right with God.

How to go about that, we Catholics know. The Catholic Church still lives, and is the one true Church. She is the Church of the centuries, from which the Western nations departed with anything but a blessing to themselves, and in drifting from which no individual Catholic has yet found true happiness.

Faith in his religion, attendance at Mass, reception of the Sacraments, personal prayer, efforts to live up to the commandments of God and to the precepts of the Church; these are the things that alone can give happiness to the soul of the Catholic; and even in this life, not to speak of the next.

So, we come to the end of this little book, in the writing of which I myself have been a prey to many varied sentiments in turn.

A Catholic cannot dwell on the thought of the Catholic Church to which he belongs without pride in all that she is in herself and indignation that her enemies should utter such vile calumnies against her and seek only to do her injury. That Catholic will have a renewed love for the high ideals the Catholic Church ever puts before him, shame and a sense of guilt that in his own life he should fall so far short of them, and a wistful longing for those loftier standards in practice which his better-self cannot but approve.

Is there a missing Catholic who has read these pages unmoved in any or all of these ways? I do not believe it. I have mentioned the taunt, “You’re a Catholic, and you’ll never be anything else.” That is true; though it is not an insult, as bitterly prejudiced people imagine, but a compliment. We appreciate it as such. But can one be a Catholic, and not respond to all that has been said in this little book?

Then, I would say, for the love of God, do something about it. Determine to improve your knowledge of your religion. Read all you can find on that subject. We all need to do that, for the teachings of our religion will not remain automatically alive in our memories. We need constantly to remind ourselves of them. Take up your prayers and your regular

attendance at Mass. Go to see your priest, and if there are any obstacles in your way, talk them over with him. He will explain ways and means. They may be much smoother and easier than you at present imagine. The happiness awaiting you will be beyond all the expectations with which you set out on your new program of life as a practical Catholic.

Nihil obstat:

J. DONOVAN

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